

# Osher Life-long Learning Institute-Sedona

## The Role and Function of the Facilitator

### Best Practices - Do's & Don'ts

#### I. Do's

1. Smile. Show your most pleasant self. Start on time. Arrange your classroom so that members are as close together as is practical.
2. Be prepared. Make notes about what you will do and say. Yet be your natural, spontaneous self.
3. **Personalize** your class. Introduce yourself; give your brief bio. How and why are you interested in this subject?
4. Ask class members to introduce themselves. Ask, “*Why* do you want to take this course?” “What would you like to learn?” Use name cards and *first* names.
5. Always keep a positive, neutral tone. Be complimentary. Show interest in each individual student.
- 6.. Make “ground rules” for operation of the class, i.e. “Keep comments under two minutes,” “Don’t interrupt,” “Be respectful and positive.” Ask class for suggestions.
7. Use brief handouts as outlines of essential ideas that can be read immediately and can easily be referred to. Emphasize *brief*. **Visuals** are always effective; large print works best.
8. Be sure to provide the necessary introductions and explanations; lectures are okay. But keep them under 20 minutes. (People stop listening after 20 minutes.) Stop for questions.
9. Always use simple, natural, conversational language. Define and explain specialized words.
10. Some class members are less willing to speak than others. Encourage the “silent” ones.
11. Always *listen* carefully. Make eye contact with the speaker.
12. If your class runs week-to-week, summarize last week’s material and suggest future topics. Keep your course tied-together, so class members have sense of continuity.
13. Around the middle of the course, re-evaluate what you’re doing. Ask, “How are we doing so far?” “Is it all making sense to you?” Don’t hesitate to *repeat* key material.
14. These practices aren’t rigid and don’t always apply. Be flexible and adapt.

**(OVER)**

*\*Note: Unlike the situation in schools where students have to attend, OLLI participants “vote with their feet.” That means that if they don’t like something about a class, they disappear, perhaps never to return. However, not to worry. There are usually some dropouts, often for reasons you couldn’t know about or anticipate.*

## **II. Don’ts**

1. Not practicing the “Do’s” on the reverse side is a “Don’t.” But relax. The “Do’s” need not be rigidly applied. Use your own experience, judgment, and imagination.
2. Don’t allow participants to distance themselves by sitting all over the classroom. They should group fairly close together so that communication is easy and comfortable.
3. Don’t use lofty, artificial language. Such language doesn’t connect well with audiences. And avoid arrogant, critical, harsh language. Such language lowers the positive tone and atmosphere needed for enthusiastic participation.
4. **Avoid criticism** of participants at all costs. Criticism damages the tone and atmosphere of the class and weakens the necessary enthusiasm and good will needed for a successful course.
5. But don’t allow individual participants to dominate. Class members do not want to hear lengthy life-stories. It’s okay to cut participants off if they’re “going on” too long. You may say, “Excuse me. We need to move on.” Ration class time so all can participate.
6. Don’t **read** to your class, except for brief quotations. If you need exactly quoted material, pass it out in handout form so participants can read it for themselves.
7. Don’t keep your class beyond quitting time. Think about the next class coming in.
8. Don’t write lots of material on the board with your back to the class. Prepare such material ahead of time. Brief markings are okay. Emphasize *brief*.
9. Don’t be preparing rebuttals or follow-up comments while a participant is speaking. Listen carefully with full eye contact. **Don’t interrupt** a participant’s comments; let her finish.
10. Don’t ignore anyone who wants to speak. As much as time allows, give everyone their chance. But don’t press those who choose not to speak. Encourage, but don’t insist.
11. Finally, relax and enjoy. Facilitating should be easy because you never need to evaluate anyone. Remember that you are a volunteer and nothing ever works perfectly. If you make what seems to you to be a mistake, let it go and push on.
12. The OLLI council would like to **thank you** for your generous willingness to volunteer